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# Cattle Owners

***You can be losing  
money because of  
brucellosis...***



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service

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Services

## **Cattle Owners... you can be losing money because of brucellosis**

Brucellosis can still be costly to cattle owners—even at its present low infection rate nationally. Less than one half of one percent of the U.S. cattle population are affected. Sometimes called Bang's disease, brucellosis is an easily spread bacterial disease of cattle and other animals including swine. It can be transmitted from animals to humans.

Infected cows abort or give birth to weak or dead calves. Cattle owners lose profits and more from reduced calf crops, delayed calf production, and lower beef and milk yields.

Abortion is the greatest single source of losses in beef cows, while lower milk yield is the single greatest factor in dairy losses. Nationally, these losses totalled an estimated \$44.5 million in 1979, with 10 high-prevalence States accounting for about 86 percent (see chart). Losses were greatest for beef cattle raisers—88 percent of the U.S. total.

Besides these direct production losses, producers spent an estimated \$30 million to control and prevent spread of brucellosis in 1979. About 62 percent of this was incurred contending with the disease, and 38 percent was incurred supporting the program.

State and federal spending on brucellosis in 1979 amounted to \$118 million.

### **Current Estimated Losses from Brucellosis**

	Dairy	Beef	Total
Alabama	\$ 145,467	\$ 1,956,337	\$ 2,101,804
Tennessee	311,989	1,079,742	1,391,731
Kentucky	406,734	2,501,597	2,908,331
Missouri	126,805	1,065,535	1,192,340
Arkansas	177,527	2,671,920	2,849,447
Oklahoma	4,307	2,634,851	2,639,158
Louisiana	377,065	3,680,789	4,057,854
Texas	1,091,003	10,939,978	12,030,981
Florida	1,424,524	4,257,076	5,681,600
Mississippi	97,616	3,272,212	3,369,828
	\$4,163,037	\$34,060,037	\$38,223,074
Remainder U.S.	\$1,228,335	\$ 5,073,252	\$ 6,301,587
Total U.S.	\$5,391,372	\$39,133,289	\$44,524,661

All of this is money...out of farmers' and ranchers' pockets...out of your pockets.

For the cattle industry at large, these losses may not seem great. Beef cattle are the single largest income-producing commodity in the United States—\$35 billion in income compared with \$8 billion for wheat in 1979. But with no program efforts to find, contain, and stamp it out, brucellosis losses could reach the billion-dollar level in less than 10 years.

For the individual farmer or rancher, a brucellosis-affected herd can be devastating. And it's not just production losses. Getting your herd up for testing costs. Even though there's an indemnity, replacing infected animals costs. Sometimes you lose highly valued bloodlines.

Also, quarantines mean marketing restrictions. No cattle can be sold for breeding or purposes other than slaughter as long as the herd is quarantined; and quarantines tend to be lengthy because of the long time it takes to eliminate infection.

## **Herd Protection**

In cattle, brucellosis is considered a herd disease. It most commonly enters a clean herd when an unsuspecting farmer or rancher buys infected or exposed animals. There's no cure for animals. But if you own cattle, you can greatly reduce the risk of brucellosis losses by:

- raising your own replacements or buying only test-negative cattle from known brucellosis-free herds;
- isolating purchased replacements, then retesting them 45 to 120 days later before mixing them with the rest of the herd;
- vaccinating heifer calves at the proper age;
- segregating cows due to calve and keeping them in a clean maternity pasture or stall until fresh; and
- isolating any animal that aborts, has a retained placenta or a uterine discharge. Then call your veterinarian or animal health official. Their evaluation can save you money.

Prevention is important, but so is detection—the earlier the better. Animal health authorities routinely test blood samples from market cattle and composite milk samples from dairy herds to screen for brucellosis. Reactors to blood tests and suspicious milk tests are traced to herds of origin.

If brucellosis is confirmed, the herd is quarantined until tests show that all diseased animals have been removed. The beef cattle raiser can continue to sell slaughter animals, and the dairy herd owner can continue to sell milk under controls established by State-Federal officials.

## ***Human Sufferers Lose***

Sometimes called undulant fever, human brucellosis can be a source of great misery to its infrequent victim. Its symptoms include intermittent fever along with aches, pains, chills, night sweats, appetite loss, weight loss, and fatigue bordering on exhaustion.

If you think you have this disease, see your doctor promptly. He can run the necessary diagnostic tests and prescribe a treatment. Neglect can lead to serious complications.

Today, human brucellosis is largely an occupational hazard for livestock handlers and slaughterhouse workers in contact with infected animals or their freshly killed carcasses. Farm household members also can contract the disease by using unpasteurized milk from infected animals.

The American Veterinary Medical Association recently recommended that unpasteurized milk sold commercially (including certified and raw milk) should carry the warning label: "Not pasteurized and may contain organisms that cause human disease."

On the other hand, no human cases have been attributed to eating meat. Bacteria that cause brucellosis tend to concentrate in the reproductive tract and udder of animals—parts that are removed at slaughter. Also, normal cooking temperatures kill the Brucella organisms.

For the people who contract brucellosis, treatment is usually effective but long and costly. A study by the California Department of Health, using 1974 figures, showed each treated case costing an estimated \$4,095 for medical expenses alone. This doesn't account for the drop in productivity caused by decreased proficiency and lost work time. Neither does it account for the pain and suffering endured.



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Human brucellosis is at a low level today, thanks to progress in reducing the exposure source—infected animals. Also, consumers of milk and dairy products are generally well protected by pasteurization and modern milk ordinances.

There were 210 "reported" cases (a tentative number) in 1980. This is down from 6,321 cases in 1947 when national record keeping began. It's probable, however, that the majority of human cases go unreported for lack of diagnosis.

### ***Self-protection***

To protect yourself from possible exposure to brucellosis:

- stay informed of disease trends and local outbreaks;
- observe good personal hygiene when handling animals, especially newborn;
- inform your doctor of your occupational hazards; and
- avoid drinking unpasteurized milk.

When visiting a foreign country, you should know that fresh cheeses made from unpasteurized goat's milk can be a source of brucellosis that's particularly harmful to humans.

When calves are being vaccinated on farm or ranch, be aware that accidental injection with Strain 19 vaccine calls for prompt medical attention.

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